

Chapter Nine

Helping Providers Prepare for and Handle Emergencies



According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the most prevalent disaster risks in Washington state are earthquakes, floods, landslides, wildfires, and winter storms. The vast majority of disasters that occur in this state are related to flooding and winter storms. It is widely predicted that Washington state will experience a major earthquake event in the near future which could leave thousands of people without homes. Preparing for a disaster is the best defense for everyone, and it is especially important for child care providers because of the highly dependent nature of the children in their care.

As the health consultant, you may be called upon to help child care programs develop plans for emergency situations. Familiarize yourself with the planning and documentation requirements of child care licensing and state and local fire codes. Build on these minimum requirements to help programs develop practical plans that meet their needs and the needs of the infants and toddlers in their care. The resource section at the back of the manual lists local emergency coordinators for each area of the state.

Emergency Preparedness

All child care centers in Washington State must establish and implement a disaster plan designed for response to fire, natural disasters, and other emergencies. The disaster plan must be:

1. Specific to the child care center or home;
2. Relevant to the area;
3. Implementable during hours of operation;
4. Reviewed annually and revised as necessary;
5. Communicated to parents and staff.

Note: *In areas where local emergency plans are in place, such as school district emergency plans, centers may follow those procedures and actions in developing their own plan.*

The disaster plan must identify:

1. Who is responsible for each aspect of the plan;
2. Procedures for accounting for all children and staff during and after the emergency;
3. How the premises will be evacuated, if necessary, and the meeting location after evacuation;
4. How to address care of children with special needs during and after a disaster;
5. How children will be provided for until parents are able to pick them up;
6. How parents will be contacted or will be able to contact the child care center or home;
7. Transportation arrangements if necessary.

Emergency Preparedness

continued

The director/provider is required to:

1. Document staff education and training of the disaster plan.
2. Conduct quarterly disaster drills for children and staff.
3. Debrief and evaluate the plan after each disaster incident or drill.
4. Post emergency telephone numbers near the telephone and evacuation plans and procedures, including a diagram of exiting routes so they are clearly visible to the parents and staff. The evacuation plan must include “how” infants and young toddlers will be transported in an emergency.

Partners in Child Care, the Snohomish County Health District’s child care team, has developed excellent plans and curricula for educating providers about disaster preparedness.

Earthquake Preparedness

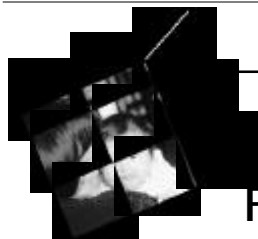
Identify hazards – The first step in preparing for an earthquake involves identifying hazards which may contribute to injuries that could happen during an earthquake. Consult the American Red Cross or local emergency management agency for information about identifying hazards. Advise providers to go through each room in a facility and assess the hazards. Cupboards should have latches. Appliances and heavy items should be stored on lower shelves. Pictures should be secured to walls with wire. L-brackets should be used to hold bookshelves to walls. TV/VCR should be secured with wide Velcro. Cribs and beds should be placed away from windows. Hanging fixtures should be secured. Glass windows should have vinyl coverings, blinds, or be made of shatter-proof glass. These are only a few examples. After the initial assessment, make a plan for correcting hazards and/or making repairs.

Identify safe places in a facility – Locate places in each room that staff and children can go if an earthquake occurs. Safe places include underneath sturdy furniture or near weight-bearing walls and away from glass and windows. Also, identify safe places outdoors, areas away from buildings, power lines, and trees. Facilities in your area that are near bodies of water may also need to prepare for a tsunami.

Practice disaster procedures by conducting earthquake drills – Planning and practicing what to do when an earthquake occurs ensures the children and staff will be able to react correctly and swiftly when the earthquake begins. Remember, there may not be time for an adult to instruct children what to do during an emergency. Earthquake drills should be conducted at different times and different days so children and staff will learn where to go no matter where they are during the day.

Fire Safety

The Fire Marshal inspects child care centers to ensure that they meet fire regulations and to identify any fire hazards that may be present. Following this initial inspection by the Fire Marshal, a licenser will conduct fire safety inspections. In addition, the provider must conduct self-inspections on a monthly basis and provide documentation of these inspections. Fire safety regulations for child care programs are in Chapter 212-56 WAC. In some areas, local ordinances are stricter than the WAC, which is written by the State Fire Marshal. If you have questions about fire safety, it is always a good idea to contact the local fire department.



Caregiver Tip

Fire Safety Information for Caregivers

Fire Safety
continued

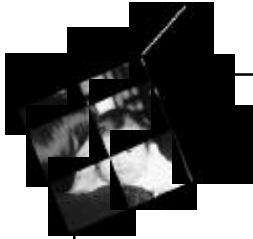
The following is a summary of fire safety information that child care providers need to know.

1. There must be two ways out of every room used by the children.
2. Battery operated smoke detectors are acceptable in child care centers serving less than 50 children. Smoke detectors should be checked monthly to be sure they are working, and batteries should be changed regularly. The Fire Marshal recommends new batteries every six months.
3. Larger centers that share space with another business or centers not at ground level must have an "electronically supervised alarm system." These systems should be tested monthly and professionally inspected every year.
4. Keep records of all tests and inspections of fire safety equipment.
5. A fire extinguisher rated 2A-10B:C must be located on each level of the facility. Fire extinguishers need to be serviced or recharged yearly. Child care providers should keep documentation of this service.
6. Keep a record of the monthly fire drills.



Disaster Preparedness

Preparing for a disaster is important for survival. Following is information about disaster kits and other tasks related to preparing for a disaster. Since preparing for an emergency can be an overwhelming task, work with providers to set goals and create a realistic timeline for completing the necessary tasks.



Caregiver Tip

What You Need to Know to Prepare for a Natural Disaster

In the event of a natural disaster, all staff should know the location of and how to turn off the gas, water, and circuit breakers, how to pitch a tent, how to light a camp stove, and the local emergency radio station.

Preparing Disaster Kits

Many providers get help from parents and others in the community to donate and obtain items that they store in a plastic garbage can or other waterproof container. Disaster kits need to include enough supplies to last for three days or 72 hours. Items to include in the kit are:

1. Disaster first aid kit;
2. Emergency water supply—three gallons of water per person (one gallon/day);
3. Food which requires no refrigeration or cooking (don't forget a hand operated can opener) and formula;
4. A camp stove, fuel, and matches;
5. A flashlight and extra batteries;
6. A battery-operated radio and extra batteries;
7. Plastic bags;
8. Diapers, soap, presealed sanitary wipes and sealable disposal bags;
9. An up-to-date class list and emergency release forms;
10. A pencil/pen and a log to track who gets released to whom;
11. Extra clothes, shoes, and socks for everyone;
12. Any special medication a child in your care may need;
13. Paper/plastic products to eat/drink from.

Consider including a comfort kit for each child. Comfort kits can be provided with familiar items that will comfort a child and may include items such as a blanket, a cuddly toy, pacifiers, photos of family members, a favorite snack, or a book. Providers may want to include a comfort kit for themselves as well.

Encourage the caregivers to develop a communication plan as part of their disaster preparation. Establishing communication lines will help parents and children reunite after a disaster has occurred. Designate an emergency contact person at the child care center or home for parents to call to check the status of their child after an emergency. This person should live out of state and at least 100 miles away. A well prepared communication plan will alleviate much of the stress that accompanies a disaster. Ways to ensure communication include: keep emergency contacts up to date and accessible, advise parents of places nearby that staff and children may gather to escape a disaster at a facility (i.e., nearby park or school), and provide parents with the facility's out-of-state contact information.

Communication lines also need to be arranged with local fire departments and other emergency management agencies. Child care providers should inform the local fire department of the location of their facility, how many children are enrolled, and what their disaster plan includes so they will have priority to be contacted after a disaster has occurred.

Emergency preparedness is an important aspect when planning for the safety of children. The guidelines that have been addressed in this section provide a basis upon which to start. When specific questions arise that are not addressed here or in the licensing requirements, encourage providers to utilize the resource list provided and/or contact their licensors. Preparing for an emergency can turn a catastrophe into an inconvenience. It will take some work, but when disaster strikes there is no substitute for being prepared.

- Assist staff in developing emergency plans for the site.
- Assist staff in practicing fire drills and other disaster drills.
- Check to see that fire extinguishers are charged and have been inspected within the last year.
- Know the emergency services in the community you serve.
- Estimate for the staff the amount of supplies they will need for infants and toddlers in their care.

Communication

Incorporating this Chapter into Your Practice



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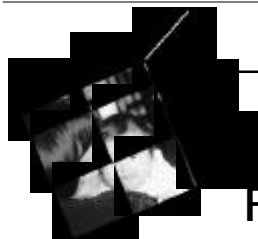
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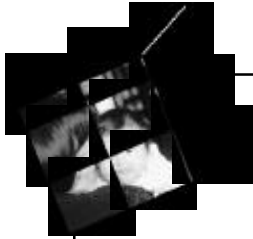
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